

IN THE CLAIMS

Amended claims follow:

1. (Currently Amended) A stacked switch using a resilient packet ring protocol comprising:

    a plurality of switch modules coupled to one another in a ring topology and each having a plurality of external terminals for interfacing with external devices, where each switch module includes:

        an external interface for communicating with the external terminals, the external interface configured to communicate using a communication protocol; and  
        an internal interface for communicating with other switches, the internal interface using a resilient packet ring (RPR) protocol;

    wherein statistics associated with a communication of data through at least one of the switch modules are stored;

    wherein the statistics are evaluated to generate a link signal representative of desired links/ports to be aggregated; and

    wherein a link aggregation port is selectively aggregated to respond to the link signal and to dynamically set one or more switch modules' external terminals to selectively aggregate information to and from the switch modules;

wherein marker information is selectively introduced into the data to ensure that the integrity of the data is reasonably maintained when a link aggregation is modified.

2. (Previously Presented) The stacked switch of claim 1, wherein each switch module further includes:

    a controller coupled to the external interface and the internal interface and configured to selectively communicate information between the external interface and the internal interface.

3. (Previously Presented) The stacked switch of claim 2, further comprising:

a master management processor coupled to one or more of the switch modules and configured to provide instructions regarding the communication of information between each switches' external interface and internal interface, and to control data flow; and

a slave management processor coupled to the master management processor through at least one switch and one or more of the switch modules and configured to provide the instructions regarding the communication of information between each switches' external interface and internal interface, and to control the data flow.

4. (Previously Presented) The stacked switch of claim 3 wherein:
  - the master management processor is configured to assign a master/slave relationship based on predetermined criteria; and
  - the slave management processor is configured to become another master management processor if the master management processor fails.
5. (Previously Presented) The stacked switch of claim 3, wherein:
  - the link aggregation port is coupled to one or more switch modules' external terminals and configured to selectively aggregate the information to and from the switch modules.
6. (Previously Presented) The stacked switch of claim 5, further comprising:
  - a memory configured to store the statistics associated with the communication of data through the at least one switch module;
    - wherein the master management processor is configured to evaluate the statistics in the memory and to generate the link signal representative of the desired links/ports to be aggregated.
7. (Currently Amended) The stacked switch of claim 6, wherein:
  - the master management processor is configured to introduce the marker information into the data to ensure that the integrity of the data is reasonably maintained when [[a]]the link aggregation is modified.

8. (Currently Amended) A method of switching data through a stacked switch using a resilient packet ring protocol, the stacked switch having a plurality of modules, where each module includes an external interface for communicating with external terminals and an internal interface for communicating with other switches using a resilient packet ring (RPR) protocol, comprising:

storing statistics associated with a communication of data through at least one module in a switch; [[and]]

evaluating the statistics to generate a link signal representative of desired links/ports to be aggregated; [[and]]

selectively activating a link aggregation port to respond to the link signal and to dynamically set one or more switch modules' external terminals to selectively aggregate information to and from the switch modules; and

selectively introducing marker information into the data to ensure that the integrity of the data is reasonably maintained when a link aggregation is modified.

9. (Cancelled)

10. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 8, wherein the statistics are based on port traffic.

11. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 8, further comprising sending a marker to facilitate handover from a first port to a second port.

12. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 8, wherein local ports on the switch are aggregated.

13. (New) The method of claim 10, wherein the statistics are used for load-balancing purposes.

14. (New) The method of claim 11, wherein a marker technique is employed to prevent an out-of-order problem when handing over traffic from the first port to the second port.